

Communicating about Death and Dying on the Phone

A Tip Sheet for Clinicians



THE OHIO STATE
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How do I use these charts?

These charts provide you with a structure to support families and deliver challenging news by phone/video. You may use them as a *guide* or as *actual scripts that you read to the family*.

Preparing Families to Say Goodbye to their Dying Loved Ones by Phone (or Video)

| LOVE | Hints | Words to use / Scripts if needed |
|---|---|--|
| Lead the way forward | | <p>"I am [name], one of the [professionals] on the team."</p> <p>"For most people, this is a tough situation."</p> <p>"I'm here to walk you through it if you'd like."</p> <p>"Here's what our institution is doing for patients with this condition." [State the part directly relevant to that person.]</p> |
| Offer the five things that matter to most people | <p>Some may need help finding the words to say.</p> <p>If they have their own words, let them lead.</p> | <p>"So we have the opportunity to make this time special."</p> <p>"Do you have ideas of what you want to say?"</p> <p>"If not, here are five things you might want to say. Only use the ones that ring true for you."</p> <p>"Please forgive me"</p> <p>"I forgive you"</p> <p>"Thank you"</p> <p>"I love you"</p> <p>"Goodbye"</p> <p>"Do any of those sound good?"</p> |
| Validate what they want to say | <p>Provide encouragement – this is hard for people to say.</p> | <p>"I think that is a beautiful thing to say"</p> <p>"If my [daughter] were saying that to me, I would feel so valued and so touched."</p> <p>"I think he/she can hear you even if they can't say anything back."</p> <p>"Go ahead; just say one thing at a time. Take your time."</p> |
| Expect emotion | <p>Watch for this. Acknowledge throughout the conversation.</p> | <p>"I can see that he/she meant a lot to you."</p> <p>"Can you stay on the line a minute? I just want to check on how you're doing."</p> |

Notifying Family that their Loved One has Died by Phone (or Video)

| LOSS | Hints | Words to use / Scripts if needed |
|---|--|--|
| L abel the discussion as serious | Ensure the family member is in a safe place to talk. | <p>“I have something serious to talk about with you.”</p> <p>“Are you in a place where you can talk?”</p> |
| O pen with a headline | <p>Avoid medical jargon.</p> <p>Keep it short and clear.</p> | <p>“I am calling about your [father]. He died a short time ago. The cause was [COVID19].”</p> |
| S upport their emotion | Watch for this. Acknowledge throughout the conversation. | <p>“I am so sorry for your loss.”</p> <p>“I can only imagine how shocking this must be. It is so sad.”</p> <p>[If you feel you must say something: “Take your time. I am here.”]</p> |
| S it in silence | | <p>S I L E N C E</p> <p>[Wait for them to restart]</p> |

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